



At WE, caring for our team is as important as caring for the world

Carrie Patterson, Executive Operations Director at WE

Mental well-being is rapidly becoming one of the great challenges facing our society. One in five people will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. Having worked over a decade in the non-profit sector, I can say it's often even harder and more complicated for those who seek to create positive change. Taking on the world's problems day after day wears you down. And when the focus of your life is helping others, it's not uncommon to feel guilty for taking even a day to look after yourself.

All too often, the concepts of self-care and caring for the world are considered mutually exclusive, even polar opposites—one is selfish and the other selfless. Nothing could be further from the truth. Studies show that helping others improves both mental and physical health. And the better you feel, the more you'll feel like helping others. Self-care and altruism are inextricably linked. It's an integral part of our mission to inspire of global shift in thinking—moving from “Me” to “We”. To change the world, start with yourself.

We set out to help others, but quickly realized we need to continuously strive and grow in supporting our own team. That's why, at WE, the physical and mental well-being of our incredible team members is a top priority. We're continually growing our staff benefits and well-being initiatives, learning from industry-recognized mental health experts to create the best possible working environment.

In 2018, we launched the WE Well-Being initiative to empower youth and families with educational tools to promote their own positive well-being and the well-being of their community. We want to build that same culture of self-care in our own workplace. As we teach others, WE has also grown. The program has provided an unparalleled opportunity to enhance our own organizational efforts and mental health literacy as we learn from leading experts with outstanding reputations in their field, like [Dr. Stan Kutcher](#), [Dr. Kimberley Schonert-Reichl](#), [Dr. Kathy Short](#), and [Dr. Jean Clinton](#).

As we developed our external well-being program, these professionals inspired and encouraged us to bring those same practices to our own staff and culture. For example, Dr. Kutcher, former director of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre in Mental Health Policy, supported our development of an internal team to conduct annual reviews of our progress in improving staff well-being in our workplace. The team will be overseen by external advisors from respected institutions including Alberta Health Services, the University of British Columbia, and Dalhousie University.

The team's input has led to the development of other policies, including mental health literacy training for new employees as part of orientation. This ensures our whole team has a clear understanding of our own mental health programs and an awareness of policies, procedures and staff support systems within WE. Ongoing training sessions for seasoned staff cover new topics in mental health literacy, as well as timely issues and other topics requested by WE staff.

We've made sure our staff benefits cover mental as well as physical health. Our Employee Assistance Program includes a 24-hour counselling line for one-on-one telephone support from health professionals.

Principles of good mental and physical health also guided the construction of our new headquarters—the WE Global Learning Centre—which opened in 2017. Natural light, un-recycled air and open space concepts were key elements of the design. Facilities include a café in the lobby, where a barista brews up complementary ME to WE coffee to fuel our work, as well as an on-site gym and yoga studio. Those



workout facilities enable us to offer ongoing benefits like physio programs and yoga classes with visiting instructors. The scientific link between physical and mental health is well established. Exercise is a known mood booster.

And we're constantly looking for little ways to boost the quality of the working experience at WE, and account for the long hours and hard work our staff put in. So, for example, we offer lieu time, a standard day off after WE Days for those who work the event, and holiday closures so staff can spend this time of year with family and friends. All WE staff can take a paid day off on their birthday, and the celebration won't be deducted from their accumulated vacation time.

Back at the office, there are plenty of clubs, teams and groups devoted to volunteering and service. WE Read is like a book club, where staff read to kids at the local library in our Regent Park community. The office Green Team planted a summer garden. When WE runs our own campaigns, staff take on the challenge in unique and creative ways, like walking dogs (WE Wag for Water) or hosting a Mario Kart video game tournament (WE Game for Water) to support our clean water initiatives. These events were run during office hours, and anyone could participate. These activities are our way of giving back to our community, and also to our staff—as I've already noted, helping others is proven to boost well-being.

We're honoured that these efforts have been recognized. WE has received strong praise.

"Any organization that is committed to understanding and effectively addressing mental health must develop mental health literacy as a foundational component of its identity. WE has taken on the challenge of becoming a mental health literate organization. Its leadership and knowledge in this work has provided it with the capacity to not only enhance its own growth but to assist others as they grow," says Dr. Kutcher.

We are immensely proud of our incredible team members who work tirelessly to support our mission and create a better world. That's why we are committed to doing everything possible to promote and enhance their well-being.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'CPatt' with a long, sweeping underline.

Carrie Patterson

Executive Operations Director